

# PART TWO

## Menus, Kitchens, and Purchasing

### Daniel Boulud

Chef Daniel Boulud, owner of some of the country's finest restaurants, author of numerous cookbooks, and creator of gourmet products, has culinary roots that can be traced back to his family's farm near Lyon, France—a place profoundly tied to the rhythms of the seasons, produce fresh from the fields, and delicious home cooking. Yet it is in his sophisticated New York restaurants that this chef has truly mastered the dining scene. In fact, Daniel Boulud is today considered one of America's leading culinary authorities, with a cooking style marked for his unique use of time-honored French technique applied to the finest seasonal American ingredients.

After his nomination as best cooking apprentice in France, Daniel went on to train under the renowned chefs who would become his mentors: Roger Vergé, Georges Blanc, and Michel Guérard. Now Boulud himself serves as a mentor to the talented young cooks he has been working with here in the United States for almost 25 years.



*Courtesy of Daniel Boulud*

Before making his way to the U.S., Daniel spent two years as sous chef in the Les Etoiles restaurant of Copenhagen's Plaza Hotel. Eager to come to America, Boulud landed in Washington, D.C., as the private chef to the European Commission. Soon after, he moved to New York City, which he has called home ever since. During his first years in New York, Daniel opened the Polo Lounge at The Westbury Hotel and later Le Régence at the Hotel Plaza Athenee.

From 1986 to 1992, Daniel was executive chef at Le Cirque. During his tenure there, the restaurant was regularly voted one of the most highly rated in the country. In 1992, Daniel earned the James Beard award for "Best Chef of New York City."

The year 1993 was an important turning point for Boulud, the year in which he set out on his own to open his much-heralded restaurant Daniel. Not long after opening, Daniel was rated "one of the 10 best restaurants in the world" by the *International Herald Tribune* and would soon become a

member of the prestigious Relais & Châteaux organization. Daniel himself was declared "Outstanding Chef of the Year" in 1994 by the James Beard Foundation, with the latter having already named him "Best Chef: New York City" in 1992. After five successful years, the chef-restaurateur relocated Daniel to its grand Park Avenue home. Since the restaurant's 1998 relocation, Daniel Boulud has also been named "Chef of the Year" by *Bon Appétit* magazine, and the restaurant has received *Gourmet* magazine's "Top Table" award, a coveted four-star rating from *The New York Times* as well as *Wine Spectator*'s "Grand Award" and New York City's top ratings for cuisine, service, and decor in the Zagat Survey.

In 1998, Daniel Boulud opened Café Boulud. The contemporary Café Boulud is an elegant French-American restaurant with an international accent and a three-star rating from *The New York Times*. It has established itself as a destination for Manhattan's café society, a spot with the cosmopolitan chic of a

Parisian rendezvous. The chef created his first restaurant outside of New York City when he launched another Café Boulud in 2003 at the legendary Brazilian Court Hotel in Palm Beach, Florida. DB Bistro Moderne, which Daniel opened in 2001, serves as his interpretation of updated bistro cooking rooted in French tradition. It is a relaxed and fast-paced Manhattan restaurant located in the City Club Hotel on West 44th Street, just steps from Times Square and the theater district.

Boulud created Daniel Boulud Brasserie in 2005. "The restaurant is reminiscent of beautiful places you've seen, but is like no place you've ever been," explains Chef Daniel Boulud of his restaurant at the Wynn Las Vegas Resort. A splendid waterfront setting sets the tone, at once Alpine lakeside *auberge* and Mediterranean seaside resort. The menu abounds with the kind of straightforward cooking that Boulud calls "French comfort food" adapted to this modern rendition of a bustling French brasserie on the Las Vegas Strip.

# CHAPTER 4

## The Menu

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

*After reading and studying this chapter, you should be able to:*

- Identify factors to consider when planning a menu.
- List and describe some common menu types.
- Discuss methods for determining menu item pricing.
- Identify factors to consider when determining a menu's design and layout.



The menu is the heart of any restaurant; it showcases everything you have to offer for food and beverages. Menus are as diverse as the number of different types of restaurants. Planning a menu is an interesting challenge and here are a few do's and don'ts when it comes to menus.<sup>1</sup>

- Check out the competition's menu and Web site. Study their menu to see the number and type of items, the prices and range of offerings. Look for similarities and differences between your prospective menu and theirs.
- Ask yourself, how will my restaurant and menu be different from and better than the others?
- The theme of the menu, its design and colors should reflect the theme and decor of the restaurant.
- Use a clear, easy to read font like Times New Roman 14 point so guests can read it, and have a pair of glasses handy in case a guest has difficulty in reading the menu.
- Have a couple of focus groups read your menu and give you feedback.
- Incorporate local names into the descriptions of dishes, such as Washington Lobster Roll, to make them sound more appealing.
- Specialty menu items can have a star or other insignia to draw attention to them, as well as appropriate placement on the menu (this is described later in this chapter).
- Use a symbol for potential ingredients that may trigger allergies in guests, such as peanuts or eggs and the like.
- For the layout, use one or two columns, not more, as it will look too crowded.
- Don't use clip art as it will look as if it was done at home. It needs to have a professional appearance.
- Don't use too much technical jargon. Sauté is fine but keep it simple and don't use words or terms that guests don't know.
- Avoid saying exactly how many pieces of food come in a dish, such as itemizing a menu by saying "six jumbo shrimp" when describing a shrimp cocktail. Simply saying "jumbo shrimp" will suffice. This way you can adjust the number and keep your food costs in line.
- Don't laminate your menu. Instead invest in menu jackets which allow you to easily change the menu.<sup>2</sup>

New restaurateurs who have found a great location often focus more on that than on the food. Many restaurateurs begin to plan the design and decor and even the marketing and promotional activities before they have completely decided on the menu.

Kitchen space is often a limiting factor for many restaurants. Preparation; the cold kitchen; pastry, dessert, and bread production; and service frequently require more space than most restaurants have available. Short of knocking out walls, something has to give. If the restaurant is open for lunch and dinner, the schedule may not leave sufficient time for desserts to be prepared. (If it is open only for dinner, pastries and desserts might be prepared in the morning.) Perhaps

they can be purchased. It is not uncommon for restaurants to purchase special desserts rather than make them.

The menu and menu planning are front and center in the restaurant business. Guests come to restaurants for a pleasurable dining experience, and the menu is the most important ingredient in this experience. One of the most important factors for patrons when deciding on a restaurant is the quality of food. This challenges operators to provide tastier presentations, offer healthier cuisine, and create new extraordinary flavors to please guests. These and other factors are critical to the menu's and the restaurant's success. The many *considerations in menu planning* attest to the complexities of the restaurant business.

Considerations in menu planning include:

- Needs and desires of guests in target market and trends
- Capability of cooks
- Equipment capacity and layout
- Consistency and seasonal availability of menu ingredients
- Price and pricing strategy
- Nutritional value
- Contribution theory
- Accuracy in menu
- Type of menu
- Actual menu items
- Menu analysis
- Menu design and layout
- Standard recipes
- Food-cost percentage

The menu is the most important part of the restaurant concept. Selection of menu items requires careful analysis. An analysis of competing restaurants will help in terms of positioning the restaurant with respect to the competition and for product differentiation. In some restaurants, the guests and servers are also asked for input, which makes for consensus building and a feeling of ownership of certain dishes. The menu must reflect the concept and vice versa. The restaurant concept is based on what the guests in the target market expect, and the menu must satisfy or exceed their expectations. Responsibility for developing the menu may begin with the chef, individually or in collaboration with the owner/manager and, perhaps, cooks and servers. Even New York superstar chef Bobby Flay, who has three high-profile restaurants, television cooking shows, and cookbooks, admits that sometimes “your feelings will betray you.” He remembers that several years ago, when he opened Bolo, his Spanish-inspired restaurant, “I had this great idea for a lobster and duck paella using arborio rice. I was so adamant about how good it would be and how well it would do. It bombed.”<sup>3</sup>

A café menu for an 85-seat restaurant featuring pastas may consist of about seven appetizers, including pastas, two salads, soup of the day, and 12 to 14 entrées (pastas, chicken, meat, seafood, vegetarian—perhaps a steak, grilled chicken, and a couple of fresh fish dishes). The meat can be grilled, sautéed, or poached and the vegetables steamed.



Concepts are best developed from the menu. When you really know your menu, you can develop a concept.



Using the analogy of restaurants to theaters, the menu is the playbill or program. The cooks and servers are the actors, and the decor is the stage set.

## Capability/Consistency

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The *capability* of the chefs or cooks to produce the quality and quantity of food necessary is a basic consideration. The use of standardized recipes and cooking procedures will help ensure *consistency*. A standardized recipe is one that, over time, has been well tested. It lists the quantities of ingredients and features a simple step-by-step method to produce a quality product. The menu complexity, the number of meals served, and the number of people to supervise are also elements that have an effect on the capability and consistency of the restaurant kitchen. Today, chefs and cooks are more innovative and creative in their approach to the culinary arts. The Culinary Olympics, local chefs' associations, and the many fine foodservice and culinary programs at colleges and universities have done much to improve the creativity of chefs and cooks.

## Equipment

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In order to produce the desired menu items, the proper *equipment* must be installed in an efficient layout. A systematic flow of items from the receiving clerk to the guests is critical to operational efficiency. Chain restaurants and experienced independent operators carefully plan the equipment for the menu so as to achieve maximum production efficiency. Menu items are selected to avoid overuse of one piece of equipment. For example, too many menu items that are broiled may slow service because the broiler cannot handle them. Most menus begin with a selection of appetizers that do not use the stovetops and grills to avoid conflict with the entrée preparation. Some appetizers are prepared and placed in the refrigerator, ready to be served cold. Others may be prepared and then fried.

## Availability

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Are the menu ingredients readily available? A constant, reliable source of supply at a reasonable price must be established and maintained. High-quality ingredients make a high-quality product, and fresh must be just that—fresh! Almost all food items are available everywhere—at a price. The operator takes advantage of the seasons when items are at their lowest price and best quality. The ups and downs in food prices can be partially overcome by seasonal menus or even daily menus, as is the case with the California Cafe, where general manager Volker Schmitz has the menu on his computer. This enables him to quickly remove an item from the menu in the event that a hurricane in the Gulf of Mexico or frost in California or Florida dramatically increases the price of fresh fish, fruit, or vegetables. A decision is made either to adjust the price or take the item off the menu.

## Price

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*Price* is a major factor in menu selection. The guest perception of the price-value relationship and its comparison with competing restaurants is important. Another important factor is a value-creation strategy. There are two basic components of value creation: what you provide and what you charge for it. To build perceived value, you need to (a) increase the perception of value of what you provide, (b) lower the price you charge for it, or (c) both. Factors that go into building perceived price-value include:

- Amount of product (portion size)
- Quality of the product (dining pleasure)
- Reliability or consistency of the product
- Uniqueness of the product
- Product options or choices (including new products)
- Service convenience (such as speed of service)
- Comfort level (such as courtesy, friendliness, and familiarity with the business)
- Reliability or consistency of service
- Tie-in offers or freebies included with the purchase

Are you selling a Cadillac or a Chevrolet? If you sell a costly Cadillac, you need to charge a Cadillac price; if it's a Chevy, a Chevy price. The most common pricing mistake of independent operators is trying to sell a Cadillac at a Chevy price.

The concept and the target market will determine the parameters of menu prices. For example, an Italian neighborhood restaurant may offer appetizers and salads in the \$2.95 to \$5.95 range and entrées in the \$6.95 to \$11.95 range. A quick-service Mexican restaurant may have a limited menu offering food in the 99 cents to \$3.89 range. The selling price of each item must be acceptable to the market and profitable to the restaurateur. Questions to ask when making this decision include:

- What is the competition charging for a similar item?
- What is the item's food cost?
- What is the cost of labor that goes into the item?
- What other costs must be covered?
- What profit is expected by the operator?
- What is the contribution margin of the item?

Consider each factor. In the dynamic marketplace of the foodservice industry, competition continually changes. Individual and chain restaurants rise and fall. New restaurants are opened, old ones are closed. New management plans, new building designs, new advertising, and, more slowly, newer modified foods are



Guests enjoying an evening at Bern's Steak House in Tampa, Florida

*Courtesy of Bern's Steak House*

forever appearing. Competition, however, usually determines menu price more than any other factor.

We know that food cost and portion size and control are the best indicators of the price to charge for dishes on a menu. For example, if we are aiming for a 33 percent food cost we can add up the cost of all the ingredients of a menu item—say chicken Cordon Bleu which costs \$2.50 to produce, including vegetables and bread and butter. It would need to sell for at least \$7.50. Now, if the restaurant across the street has a similar dish on the menu for \$12.95 then you could price yours at \$9.95 and look like a hero.

## FACTORS IN PRICING

Menu items are selected to complement the restaurant image and appeal to its target market. For example, hamburgers come in a variety of prices, depending on whether they are self-served or table served, their size, their garnish, the atmosphere, and convenience in reaching the restaurant. No one expects to get a hamburger served on a white tablecloth at the same price as one served from a counter. At 21 in New York, a hamburger costs \$30 and is served with green beans, roasted tomatoes, caramelized onions, and choice of potato.<sup>4</sup> By contrast, a quick-service restaurant burger costs about \$1.49.

A walk-up select-your-own steak may cost a third less than one served at a table in a quiet, attractive dining room, such as Bern's Steak House in Tampa, Florida. Bern's is a large establishment with multiple rooms and expensive decor, including murals of French vineyards, antiques, columns, and Tiffany lamps.

Bern's reputation has been built over the past 40 years by creating an aura around its beef. The restaurant buys only U.S. prime beef, which is then aged for an additional 4 to 10 weeks in specially built lockers controlled for humidity and temperature. The menu lists six basic cuts, from Delmonico to porterhouse. They are available in any thickness and broiled to eight levels of doneness.<sup>5</sup>

## MENU PRICING STRATEGIES

There are two main *menu pricing strategies*. A comparative approach analyzes the competition's prices and determines the selection of appetizers, entrées, and desserts. Individual items in each category may then be selected and priced. The cost of ingredients must equal the predetermined *food-cost percentage*.

The second method is to price the individual menu item and multiply it by the ratio amount necessary to achieve the required food-cost percentage. This method results in the same expected food-cost percentage for each menu item. It is not the best strategy. An expensive fresh fish item may be priced too high when compared to the customer's perception of value or to the prices charged by the competition. A glass of iced tea might have a beverage cost of 15 cents and sell for 75 cents, when it could be priced at \$1.50.

This may lead to a weighted average approach, whereby the factors of food-cost percentage, contribution margin, and sales volume are weighted. This strategy allows for the stars to save the dogs. The stars are the high-selling items with the greatest contribution margin (gross profit). These items are strategically placed on the menu at focal points that will attract the greatest attention. A problem with this approach is that averages are relied on to separate the high-selling items from the low-selling items. Guest choices can tilt the food-cost percentage.

## CALCULATING FOOD-COST PERCENTAGE

Food cost is reflected in pricing. The cost of food varies with sales (a variable cost). When stated as a percentage of sales, food cost provides a simple target for the chef and management to aim for, becoming a barometer of the profitability of the restaurant.

Traditionally, menus were priced by using a fixed markup, or multiple, based on food cost. The system worked fairly well in that other costs tended to be fairly predictable in a well-managed restaurant with a steady market. If, for example, 33 percent of the sales figure was used as a food-cost percentage target and other costs were steady, the main food items were multiplied by 3 to arrive at a sales price. A number of items, such as coffee, tea, cola, desserts, and soups, were sold at a much lower food-cost percentage. They balanced the higher-cost menu items and waste, which made it possible to achieve the target cost of 33 percent.

Steakhouses came along, and their operators saw that the traditional factor markup did not apply. Steaks could be purchased precut and sold at a price that would permit a 40 percent food cost, or higher, and still the operation was successful. The reason was that the labor cost in preparing and serving steak

ran 15 to 20 percent, or even less, as a percentage of sales. The lower labor cost permitted a higher food cost. Operators use food and labor costs as a combination known as prime cost, which should be close to 55 to 60 percent of sales. This allows for a 15 to 20 percent operating profit. The food-cost percentage is the most frequently quoted percentage in the restaurant business. It is generally calculated weekly or monthly. The method of calculating a simple food-cost percentage is:

$$\begin{aligned} &\text{Opening inventory} + \text{Purchases} - \text{Closing inventory} \\ &= \text{Cost of food consumed} \end{aligned}$$

$$\text{Food cost/Sales of food} = \text{Food-cost percentage}$$

Opening inventory	\$10,000
+ Purchases	\$66,666 purchases + storeroom requisitions
Total food consumed	\$76,666
– Closing inventory	\$10,000
= Cost of food consumed	\$66,666

If total sales were \$200,000 for the month, the food cost of \$66,666 divided into the \$200,000 would produce a food cost of 33 percent. This is a basic calculation, which becomes more complex when transfers, returns, breakages, mistakes, guest returns, spillage, employee meals, promotional meals, and so on are factored into the equation. The method of calculating a more complex food-cost percentage is:

$$\text{Opening inventory} + \text{Purchases} = \text{Total available for sale}$$

$$\begin{aligned} &- \text{Returns to supplier} \\ &+ \text{Cooking liquor} \\ &- \text{Lounge and bar food (promotional and giveaway)} \\ &- \text{Promotional food} \\ &= \text{Cost of food} \end{aligned}$$

Taking a food inventory is time-consuming and complicated. The storeroom and kitchen must be orderly to make the work of the auditor or inventory-taker easier. One method requires that prices be marked on the food items or recorded in the inventory computer file or a book.

## **Nutritional Value**

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Restaurant guests, some more than others, are becoming increasingly concerned about the *nutritional value* of food. This is creating a higher demand for healthier items, such as chicken and fish. In fact, two-thirds of all seafood is eaten in restaurants. Fish and shellfish have far less fat than other protein foods.

Seafood is lower in cholesterol and sodium, and has high amounts of the highly polyunsaturated omega-3 fatty acids, which are thought to help in heart attack prevention. Greater public awareness of healthy food and individual wellness has prompted operators to change some cooking methods—for example, they are broiling, poaching, steaming, casseroles, or preparing rotisserie chicken instead of frying. Kentucky Fried Chicken, to divert attention from the word *fried* in the title, changed its name to KFC. The company also changed its cooking oil, which included some animal fats, to 100 percent vegetable oil. Some restaurants place a heart sign next to menu items that are recommended for guests with special low-fat dietary needs. A few restaurants put the number of calories beside each item on the menu. Most chain restaurants have taken steps to provide lighter and healthier food. As an example, McDonald's publishes the complete nutritional breakdown of its menu items and has changed its cooking oil for potatoes from animal fat, high in cholesterol, to 100 percent vegetable oil, which is cholesterol free.

Consumers are more concerned about a food's fat content than about cholesterol and sodium. A number of restaurants offer menus with leaner meats and more seafood and poultry. Bob Wattel, executive vice president of Lettuce Entertain You Enterprises in Chicago, notes that, on the whole, heart-healthy menu items have sold well. Some of the best sellers in Lettuce's program include tuna *asada* with papaya relish, charred tuna pizza, and angel hair pasta with shrimp and artichokes. The trend toward healthier foods appears to be here to stay, giving seafood a leading role in menu planning.

The National Restaurant Association recommends that restaurateurs offer meatless main dishes or vegetarian selections. About 15 percent of restaurant customers look for operations that serve vegetarian fare, and at least 20 percent of restaurant goes order meatless items. Wholesome and Hearty Foods, located in Portland, Oregon, encourages people to "eat positive." They specialize in a variety of Gardenburgers. The "Original" Gardenburger is made with mushrooms, onions, rolled oats, brown rice, cheese, and spices.

There is no doubt that much of the public believes that healthy eating contributes to prolonging our active lives. Already established restaurants are offering more choices for health-conscious customers. Among the trends, restaurant operators reported (in a National Restaurant Association study) an increase in guest interest in lower-fat menus. Quick-service restaurants are under pressure due to fast food ties to obesity. McDonald's discontinued their "supersize menus" due to low sales. The movie *Supersize Me* was also reported to play a hand in the dropping of the supersize menu.

Increasing numbers of restaurants are serving *vegetarian*, *vegan*, and the latest craze, *raw fare*. Vegetarian restaurants, such as Radha located in Manhattan and New World Vegetarian in Oakland, California, do not serve meat: no beef, poultry, fish, or their by-products. Vegan restaurants such as Good Karma in San Francisco and Strictly Roots in Manhattan are stricter than vegetarian restaurants. They exclude everything a vegetarian restaurant excludes, plus all dairy products.

Vegans also refrain from wearing clothing that involves the death or suffering of animals (such as leather, silk, and fur). Some vegans refrain from consuming honey. Raw bars or restaurants such as Raw Energy Organic Juice & Café in Berkeley, California, do not serve food heated above 116°F. Some restaurants simply offer a vegetarian dish or two; others, like Grassroot Organic Restaurant in Tampa, Florida, target, expand, and combine their menu to appeal to vegetarians, vegans, and those seeking a raw diet.

Offering more nutritional and natural food is a challenge. Chipotle, whose mission is to change the way people think about fast food by offering foods with integrity, such as naturally raised proteins like beef, pork, and chicken have two main challenges. First is availability, trying to get enough naturally raised protein and have it available to all its stores. The second is price; guests are prepared to pay a little more: say, \$6 but not \$15 for a burrito. The solution for Chipotle is to keep supply in balance with their economic model.<sup>6</sup>

Several cities have now banned *trans fatty acids*—commonly termed trans fats which are a type of unsaturated fat and may be monounsaturated or polyunsaturated. Most trans fats consumed today are industrially created as a side effect of partial hydrogenation of plant oils. The process changes a fat's molecular structure, raising its melting point and reducing rancidity (thus increasing its shelf life), but this process also results in a fat becoming trans fat. Eating trans fat increases the risk of coronary heart disease—it not only increases the LDL cholesterol (the bad cholesterol) but also decreases the HDL cholesterol (the good cholesterol). Several restaurants and companies have, of their own volition, removed trans fat from their menus and product lines.

## **Contribution Margin**

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When you know the contribution margin, you can make better decisions about whether to add or subtract a product line and how to price your product or service.<sup>7</sup> The *contribution margin* is the difference between the sales price and the cost of the item. The amount left over when the cost of the item is deducted from the selling price (the gross profit) is the contribution that is made toward covering the fixed and variable costs. It works like this: If restaurant A offers a steak on the menu that costs \$5 and sells for \$14.95, the contribution margin is \$9.95 for every steak sold. The margin of \$9.95 goes to pay the fixed and variable costs, including 15 percent for surrounding plate costs, such as vegetables and sauces, and leaves some over for profit. Profit is the amount left over after all expenses have been paid.

## **Flavor**

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*Flavor* is the sensory impression (taste) of a food or beverage. Other factors that come into play when determining the taste of a dish are aroma, texture, sight, and

sound. In other words, taste involves all the senses. Many foods are altered with flavorings to change the taste.

With the new millennium, it is clear that the American foodservice industry is on the expressway to a broader range of ethnic and international foods with expanded flavor profiles. Consumers are embracing ethnic cuisines like never before, as restaurateurs begin to use flavor as the main tool to differentiate themselves from each other.

There is no doubt that the American palate is craving an increase in the breadth and complexity of flavor in foods. There are big flavors, spicy flavors, fresh flavors—flavors from a world of diverse cultures that are rapidly changing American restaurant food.

Some chefs feel that fusion cuisine has run its course and that Americans want their food to taste familiar, with just a hint of a foreign influence—perhaps a predominant flavor, ingredient, or cooking method. Terms like *marinated* and *smoked* are being featured on more menus, once again indicating a trend to more flavorful foods.

According to *Flavor and the Menu* magazine, other forecasted menu trends include a focus on healthy flavors, portion control, humble foods, authentic ethnic, and exotic endings. Figure 4.1 shows a menu from Union Square Cafe—*yum*—very flavorful.

## Accuracy in Menu

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Most states have statutes stipulating that businesses (including restaurants) may not misrepresent what they are selling. Restaurants must be accurate and truthful when describing dishes on the menu. This means that if the trout on the menu comes from an Idaho trout farm, it cannot be described as coming from a more exotic-sounding location. Similarly, if the beef is described as prime, then it must be prime, judged according to U.S. Department of Agriculture Standards; butter must be butter, not margarine; and fresh cream must be fresh. Some restaurants have been heavily fined for violations of accuracy in menu. At least two class-action lawsuits challenging the accuracy of dietary data on restaurant menus have operators wondering if trendy menu-labeling mandates will open the floodgates for similar litigation.<sup>8</sup>

New York became the first municipality to enact a menu-labeling calorie count requirement. In California and Texas, other lawsuits are pending. These suits relate to Applebee's "Guiltless Grill" and the "Sensible Fare" dishes at Macaroni Grill, "Border Smart" dishes at On the Border, and low-calorie salads from The Cheesecake Factory. Results of tests reported by television stations indicated that, for example, On the Border's chicken fajitas were found to have 654 calories and 26.5 grams of fat instead of the 570 calories and 9 grams of fat listed.<sup>9</sup>



Given the trend toward more fla-

vorful food, it makes sense to promote flavor with menu descriptions such as aromatic, spicy, tangy, crisp, smoked, char-broiled, marinated, fresh, crunchy, wood-fired, sizzling, and the like.



**FIGURE 4.1:** The menu from the popular award-winning Union Square Cafe features a cuisine of America with rustic Italian flavor  
*Courtesy of Danny Meyer*

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**Appetizers**


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Bibb and Red Oak Leaf Lettuce Salad with Grated Gruyère and Dijon Vinaigrette	11.50
USC's Green Salad with Garlic Croutons and Oregano Vinaigrette	8.50
Black Bean Soup with Lemon and a Shot of Australian Sherry	8.50
Heirloom Tomato Salad with Crumbled Coach Farm Goat Cheese, Sweet Onions & Basil	13.00
Risotto with Rock Shrimp, Cucumber, Jalapeño and Cilantro	13.50
Tagliarini with Sweet Corn, Roasted Tomatoes, Pancetta and Gorgonzola Cream	12.00
<i>Penne alla Norma</i> – Sicilian-Style Pasta with Roasted Eggplant, Tomato and Ricotta Salata	11.00
<i>Fettuccine Papalina al Tartufo</i> – with Prosciutto, Parmigiano Reggiano and Black Truffle Butter	12.50
<i>Strozzapreti alla Campidanese</i> – Pasta Twists with Saffron, Tomatoes, and Sweet Fennel Sausage	11.50
<i>Insalata Siciliana</i> with Crispy Sardines, Roasted Peppers, Green Olives and Caciocavallo	13.00
Sheep's Milk Ricotta Gnocchi with Wilted Arugula and Lemon Cream	12.50
Terrine of Spiced Duck Foie Gras with Peach-Fig Chutney	15.00
Union Square Cafe's Fried Calamari with Spicy Anchovy Mayonnaise	11.25

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**Main Courses**


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Herb-Roasted Organic Chicken with Summer Vegetable Panzanella	26.00
Indian Spiced Vegetables – Glazed Eggplant, Potato Bread, Mushroom Basmati, Chick Peas & Spinach	23.00
Sautéed Wild Striped Bass with Roasted Roma Tomato Vinaigrette, Greenmarket Summer Squash, Baby Zucchini and Cipollini Onions	27.00
USC's Grilled Marinated Filet Mignon of Tuna with Gingered Vegetables and Wasabi-Mashed Potatoes	30.00
Searced Wild Alaskan Salmon with Balsamic Butter, Sautéed Spinach, Sweet Corn and Shiitake Mushrooms	28.00
Crispy Lemon-Pepper Duck with Peach-Fig Chutney, Farro and Swiss Chard	26.00
Grilled Lamb Chops <i>Scotta Dita</i> with Potato-Gruyère Gratin and Sautéed <i>Insalata Tricolore</i>	29.00
Grilled Smoked Black Angus Shell Steak with Mashed Potatoes and Frizzled Leeks	29.00

Michael Romano, Executive Chef-Partner

**FIGURE 4.1:** (continued)

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**Specials for Thursday Dinner**


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Iced Oysters	Salutation Cove (PEI)    Steamboat (WA)    Totten Inlet (WA)	1.95ea
Cocktail	USC's Campari Citrus Cooler – <i>Campari, Aranciata and Lime</i>	9.00
Chef's Soup	Hearty Split Pea with Bacon and Herbed Croutons	8.50
Appetizer	<i>Tonnarelli all' Aragosta</i> – Housemade Square-Cut Spaghetti with Roasted Lobster-Heirloom Tomato & Basil Sauce	14.00
Entrée	Pan Seared Scallops with Sautéed Chanterelles, Roasted Brussels Sprouts, Crispy Cardoons and Golden Tomato-Pancetta Butter	28.50
Cheeses	Taleggio (Lombardy) – <i>Soft-ripened raw cow's milk with salty &amp; nutty nuances</i> Saint-Maure (Loire, AOC) – <i>Ash coated, pleasantly salty fresh goat's milk</i> Bingham Hill Sweet Clover (Fort Collins, CO) – <i>Rich, nutty, semi-firm raw sheep's milk</i>	9.50
Dessert	Greenmarket Apple Pie with Caramel Ice Cream	8.50

**Featured Wines by the Glass**

Lieb Cellars Pinot Blanc (North Fork) 2001	GLASS 9.00 BOTTLE 35.00
Bedell Cellars, Merlot (North Fork) 2000	GLASS 9.25 BOTTLE 35.00

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**Weekly Specials**


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Monday	USC's Lobster "Shepherd's Pie"— with Mushrooms, Mashed Potatoes, Spinach, Carrots and Lobster Sauce	29.00
Tuesday	Roast Dry-Aged Prime Rib <i>au Jus</i> with Twice-Baked Gruyere Potatoes and Sautéed Green Beans	32.00
Wednesday	<i>Porchetta Arrosta</i> — Roast Suckling Pig with Rosemary, Garlic, Sautéed Greens and Herb-Roasted Potatoes	28.00
Thursday	<i>Bollito di Vitello</i> — Fork-Tender Veal Steamed in White Wine with Braised Vegetables, Aromatic Herbs and Tangy Salsa Verde	28.50
Friday	Roman Style Roasted Baby Lamb with Sautéed Wild Mushrooms, Eggplant and <i>Fagioli all'Uccelletto</i>	29.50
Saturday	Grilled Rib Steak for Two with Béarnaise Sauce, Grilled Red Onions and Potato-Gruyère Gratin	30.00 <small>Two Persons</small>
Sunday	<i>Ossobuco</i> – White Wine-Braised Veal Shank with Sautéed Dandelion and Crispy Polenta	28.00

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**Vegetables and Condiments**


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Sautéed Broccoli Rabe "Mama Romano Style"	5.00	Creamy Polenta with Mascarpone, Toasted Walnuts and Crumbled Gorgonzola	6.00
Union Square Cafe's Mashed Potatoes with Frizzled Leeks	5.00	Sautéed Spinach with Lemon and Extra-Virgin Olive Oil	6.50
<i>Fagioli alla Toscana</i> – Simmered White Beans with Savory Herbs and Pecorino	5.00	Grilled Slices of Sweet Red Onion	4.50
		Hot Garlic Potato Chips	5.00

The Union Square Cafe Cookbook  
&  
Second Helpings from Union Square Cafe  
Autographed Copies, \$35.00 each

**FIGURE 4.1:** (continued)



**FIGURE 4.1:** *(continued)*

## Sustainable Menus

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Seasonal, sustainable ingredients drive the menu at many contemporary restaurants. One example is Founding Farmers, a 250-seat upscale casual operation in Washington, D.C. The restaurant is bankrolled by the 42,000 member North Dakota Farmers Union. Given that the livelihoods of these farmers depend on small-scale agriculture, their attachment to this concept is highly personal. The Founding Farmers restaurant further leverages the sustainability angle by having the restaurant meet both leadership in energy-efficient design standards and Green Certified Restaurant operational standards.<sup>10</sup> The food is billed as “home-made and “scratch-made” traditional American classics inspired by the heartland with sustainably farmed produce, including locally sourced items and in season vegetables and fruits whenever possible.”

Another example comes from Ubuntu, a Napa Valley restaurant that has its own garden, where executive chef Jeremy Fox says that the cooks treat those vegetables with care and respect not just to meet his standards, but to meet their own.<sup>11</sup>

## Kids' Menus

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Restaurants that cater to families usually have a separate kids' menu—one using bold colors and catchy make-believe characters. Children like fun and humor. They come in various ages from toddlers to young teenagers; one size does not fit all. Children like tiny prizes to take home, and they like to be involved and treated as more grown-up than they really are. Burger King introduced Big Kid meals to capture the preteen crowd. Others followed suit.

Many restaurants—McDonald's, for example—set aside play areas for children. Almost any restaurant can set aside a kids' corner (if only in self-defense). Some upscale restaurants would just as soon have parents leave the kids at home.

Most restaurants can provide fun placemats, crayons, and small take-home prizes for kids. Someone on the staff who likes children and enjoys serving them should be the one to wait on them. Someone who is “cool,” uses their vocabulary, and is bushy-tailed, lively, and laughs easily is best for the job.

Restaurants serving pancakes can make a funny face on the top pancake with a few berries or colored forms. Take a hint from McDonald's and come up with your own mascot—an animal, silly character, or monster man. The character can be male or female. Kids also enjoy innocuous creatures like make-believe spiders, big bugs, and other crazy creatures.

*Restaurant Hospitality* magazine conducts a Best Kid's Menu in America contest annually and publishes the results.<sup>12</sup> Here are some suggestions:

- Don't keep families with kids waiting.
- Waitstaff should bend over to talk to children eye to eye, never patronize them, and use simple vocabulary.

- There should be items familiar to children on kids' menus because they usually don't want to try the unfamiliar. Snacks or vegetables should be provided while they are waiting for their entrées.
- Thirty-nine percent of children picked American foods as their favorite; 21 percent picked Italian, 20 percent Chinese, and 15 percent Mexican.
- Once kids are eight or nine, they eat a wider variety of adult foods. Junior menus should provide larger portions for older kids, including vegetables, tossed salad, ribs, steaks, fish, and a choice of potatoes.

## Menu Items

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In the interests of sustainability and their bottom line, restaurateurs are increasingly seeking out menu items that use local ingredients. This not only ensures a fresher product but also saves transporting it across several states. Additional sustainable measures include selecting cooking methods that require the use of less gas or electricity.

Independent restaurant menus tend to be more creative and adventurous than those of chain restaurants. The chefs tend to have a more extensive culinary background and a flair for innovation. Chain restaurants appeal to a broader section of the market and therefore have menu offerings that reflect items popular with the mass market.

The *menu items* selected will depend on the type of restaurant. The number and range of items on the menu is critical to the overall success of the restaurant. If the menu offerings are too extensive, there will be problems in getting the food to the guests in a timely manner. A family restaurant, for example, is mainstream for all ethnic groups and needs to offer a range of popular menu items. A balance is achieved by offering a selection of hot and cold appetizers, soups, and salads. Entrées might include several types of meat, poultry, fish, pasta, and dessert. Soups might include a popular favorite like vegetable beef, plus a daily special. Salads, which could also be served as a main dish, would likely include house salad, chef's salad, or Oriental chicken, fajita, or Caesar salad. Entrée dishes reflect the basic American family-type meal, including char-broiled chicken, baked halibut or codfish, fried shrimp, steaks, burgers, and a variety of sandwiches. Desserts may include a selection of ice creams and cakes or pastries. A choice of salad dressings is usually offered.

Adding new items to the menu can be risky. The large chain restaurants with decisions made at headquarters must reduce their risk, because the failure of menu items at several restaurants can be very costly. Most chains use a rational decision-making process (see Figure 4.2) in one form or another. The steps that chains used in this process vary; not all of them are appropriate for every type of restaurant.

Independent restaurants can simply put on a new item as a special and, if it's popular, add it to the main menu.

1. Create an objective and a timetable.
2. Develop a list of possible menu ideas.
3. Narrow that list down.
4. Test those ideas with consumers.
5. Build prototypes.
6. Internally narrow the prototypes down.
7. Test and renew the prototypes in selected restaurants.
8. Put the prototypes on the menu.

**FIGURE 4.2:** Rational decision-making process for menu item selection

Today not only high-profile and fine-dining restaurants are shaping the industry; even chain restaurants are taking a role.

Obviously, the public is much more acquainted with star chefs like Emeril Lagasse, Wolfgang Puck, Charlie Trotter, Jean-Georges Vongerichten, and Danny Meyer, but you do not have to be a star chef to help shape the industry. For example, Einstein/Noah Bagel Corporation, Famous Dave's, and Panera Bread all have received Menu Masters Awards.

## APPETIZERS AND SOUPS

Six to eight appetizers are adequate for the majority of restaurants. Most of these can be cold or cooked ahead and zapped in the microwave for speed of service and to avoid use of equipment being used for the entrées.

To accommodate a variety of guest tastes, offer a balance in the appetizer list by selecting an item from each generally accepted group of offerings. For example:

- Chilled fresh tiger prawns cooked in saffron lemon tea with couscous semolina, almonds, bell pepper, angel hair, and avocado
- House-smoked duck breast served with baby corn and wild rice
- Ravioli of Pacific prawns served with fresh thyme cream sauce and diced bell pepper
- California potpourri salad served with almond raspberry vinaigrette and tender lettuce and oak leaves, dressed with warm goat cheese and rosemary

The selection of appetizers should be interesting enough for the guest to want to try one but not so filling as to detract from the entrée. It is a good idea to ensure that at least some of the appetizers utilize kitchen equipment that is separate from the equipment used for the entrée. An examination of some family restaurant menus indicates heavy use of the fryer for such items as chicken strips, onion rings, fried zucchini, and fried mozzarella. One of the nonfried or partially fried items could be nachos supreme (crispy tortilla chips with spicy ground beef, Mexican-style beans, cheddar cheese, green onions, chopped tomatoes, black olives, guacamole, and sour cream, with salsa on the side).

Independent dinner restaurants tend to be more adventurous than chain restaurants. Typical appetizers might include shiitake mushrooms in a sherry herb garlic sauce with Indonesian spice; smoked salmon served with capers, lemon, grapes, fresh fruit, and cheddar cheese; baked Brie coated with almonds and served with fresh fruit; shrimp cocktail; Dungeness crab with sherry cream dressing; fresh oysters; and marinated artichokes.

Presentation of the appetizer is important because it is generally the first item guests see and taste. Consider whether appetizers on the dinner menu will be the same as the ones on the luncheon menu.

The kind and number of soups to offer depends on the restaurant concept and the guests. Soups may be categorized as thick, thin, clear, cream, cold, or chowder. Some menus might include a popular favorite like chicken noodle and a daily special, or more exotic Louisiana clam chowder with Tabasco butter.

## **SALADS**

With the increase in the variety of salad items and their year-round availability, salads have become the preferred starter in a growing number of restaurants. Typically salads are served before the meal, as a light appetizer. Today more Americans are ordering them as main courses. Restaurants are adding new ingredients to give guests more variety.

The variety of ingredients that combine to make salads is almost endless. Salads range from a classic garden salad, to salads with Mandarin oranges and almonds, or crispy noodles and chicken topped with a light Oriental dressing. Salads made with chicken, beef, seafood, fruits, and vegetables topped with exotic dressings are increasing in popularity, as guests are looking for ways to add fruits and vegetables to their diet. Traditional Caesar and Cobb salads are top main-dish salad choices.

Even McDonald's is adding healthier, lighter fare to their menu. Today McDonalds offers a variety of choices including Chicken Caesar, Cobb, Ranch, Fiesta, and more.

## **ENTRÉES**

Generally, in a table-service restaurant, there should be at least eight entrées. This allows for a minimum selection cooked in a variety of ways (baked, broiled, sautéed, fried, grilled, poached, and simmered). To maintain a balance, there should be an item or two from each of the major meat, pasta, poultry, seafood, and fish categories. One item, such as chicken, can be cooked in different ways: lemon herb chicken (broiled), grilled chicken breast marinated in ginger vinaigrette, chicken fajitas (sautéed), or chicken in the style of Burgundy (simmered).

## **DESSERTS**

Desserts may include a selection of fruits, pies, cakes, ices, and pastries. When properly merchandised, they can boost the average check and profit of the operation.

Most restaurants cannot afford the luxury of a pastry chef. However, there are alternative ways of offering high-quality desserts to restaurant guests. They may be purchased from a local pastry shop or bakery. Another way is to purchase a tart base and add fruit and yogurt to it. Some restaurants have a sundae bar where guests serve themselves ice cream and frozen yogurt and add a variety of toppings.

### **MATCHING/PAIRING<sup>13</sup>**

In the past, food and wine pairings used to be classics, such as oysters with Chablis or a beef roast with claret or Beaune.

Today's menus take their inspirations not only from Europe but also from Asia, Latin America, and once-ignored corners of the United States, and the wines come from every continent except Antarctica.

The new classics couple a type of wine with a general class of food, with the recipe serving as an example. For instance, baked goat cheese frequently shows up on menus in salads, on a designer pizza, or incorporated into a baked *mélange*. The accompanying wine is a sauvignon blanc. That works well when goat cheese is part of a fruit course, where a crisp dry wine such as sauvignon blanc fits better than it might with the cheese course at the end of the meal.

Another example is seared tuna. Its naturally purple-red meat turns gray when cooked, but it is juicy and jewel-like when raw. Taking a cue from sushi bars, which serve tuna raw, modern cooks not only serve uncooked tuna with Japanese seasonings as an appetizer but also have devised ways to impart a little more flair by seasoning and quickly flash-cooking the surface of a block of tuna. The black and gray of the cooked surface frame the translucent red center. A wine to complement this contemporary classic would be a chardonnay, whose spicy flavors from barrel fermentation and buttery undertone cozy up to the heady flavors and textures of the lightly cooked tuna.

With grilled salmon, the wine of choice today seems to be a pinot noir. The trend toward red wine with salmon appears to have started in the Pacific Northwest, where wine drinkers discovered that Oregon pinot noir goes well with fish.

Smoked tomatoes have appeared on menus recently, adding a distinctively sweet-and-smoky flavor to any dish that calls for fresh tomatoes. Pasta primavera is not the same anymore. To match this new classic, try a modern-style Chianti with a tinge of smokiness from aging in small oak barrels. Combine it with the pasta and smoked tomatoes, and the flavors practically reverberate.

## **Menu Types**

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Restaurants in the French tradition offer menus that feature about the same number of items in each category and follow the classical sequence of dining: first the hors d'oeuvres, followed by soup, then seafood, entrées, *grillades* (grilled meat items), legumes (vegetables), salads, and, finally, desserts.

The really fancy restaurants are likely to offer several specialties of the house or chef. Dinner-house menus separate similar entrées: beef in one section, seafood in another. House specialties may be offered as a group. Many menus have breakfast items, dessert items, and beverages grouped in separate sections.

Coffee shops usually offer a separate page of breakfast items even though they may be available around the clock. The typical table-service restaurant uses three or even four menus—for breakfast, luncheon, and supper. Separate children's menus with smaller portions and lower prices may also be provided.

À la carte menus offer individually priced items. Most restaurants use this type of menu.

A table d'hôte menu offers a selection of several dishes from which patrons choose to make a complete meal at a fixed price. There may be a choice of items for appetizers, soups and salads, entrées, and desserts. For the guest, the advantage of this type of menu is value. With the price fixed, the guest is assured of a meal at a guaranteed price. The advantage for the restaurateur is that the number of menu items is limited.

Some restaurants add a list of daily specials to an à la carte menu. These items take much of the pressure off the kitchen staff, especially on a busy night, because approximately 70 percent of guests may order from this “select” menu insert.

Other *menu types* include the du jour menu, which is a list of food items served only on a particular day. Du jour literally means “of the day,” as in “soup du jour.” Cyclical menus, which repeat in cycle every few days (normally 7, 10, 14, or 28 days), are generally used in institutions.

The California menu is so named because, in many California restaurants, guests may order any item from the menu at any time of the day. Many restaurants have a separate menu for each meal—breakfast, lunch, dinner, and perhaps brunch. Figure 4.3 shows the format for a simple one-page menu.

The tourist menu is occasionally used to attract tourists' attention to a particular restaurant. Generally this kind of menu underlines value and acceptability to a guest who may be traveling in a foreign country where the food may be decidedly different.

## LUNCH AND DINNER MENUS

From the viewpoint of both guests and restaurant operators, the lunch menu is different from the dinner menu. Today most lunch guests have about 45 minutes in which to order and enjoy a meal. This means that the menu needs to be easy to read and the kitchen must be capable of producing the food quickly. In most cities, a psychological price barrier keeps lunch menu prices under \$10. At dinner, when guests have more time to enjoy a leisurely meal, both the portions and the prices tend to be a little larger.

## DEGUSTATION (CHEF'S TASTING) MENUS

A number of exclusive restaurants are offering their guests a degustation menu—meaning “to taste with relish.” A degustation menu is a sample of the

<b>Appetizers</b>	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
<b>Soups</b>	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
<b>Entrées</b>	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
<b>Desserts</b>	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
<b>Beverages</b>	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____

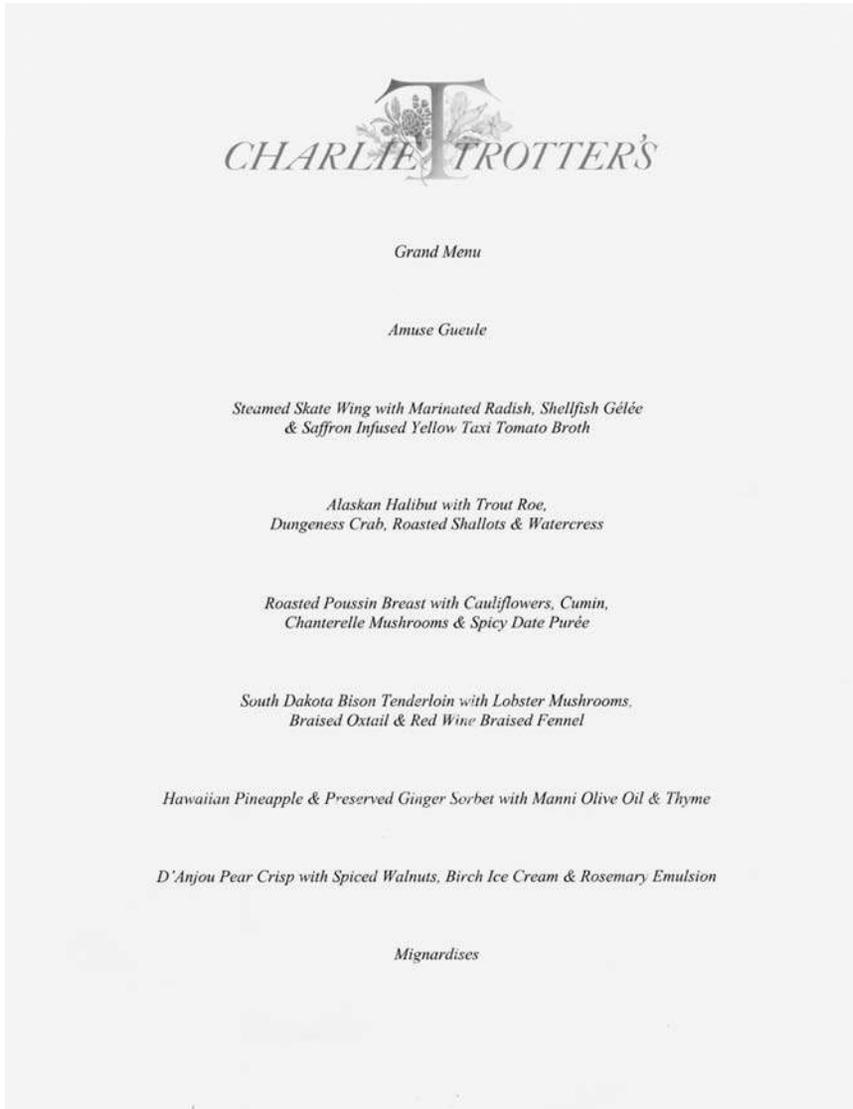
**FIGURE 4.3:** Sample of a menu format showing the sequencing of items

chef's best dishes. They are served in several courses, showcasing the chef's flair for combining flavors and textures. Without a doubt, degustation menus take a lot longer to serve than normal dining menus.

At Charlie Trotter's in Chicago, customers have been able to choose from several tasting menus for several years. Each menu, produced daily, highlights the freshest foodstuffs obtainable. The menus are presented in three formats, each offering a unique perspective. Additionally, the kitchen can customize the evening's menu to complement the guests' wine selections.

The Grand Menu offers a sumptuous variety that weaves together pristine seasonal products. This menu features seafood and meat selections supported by vegetable and grain elements. Conceived to be experienced with a progression from lighter white wine to fuller red wine, this menu demonstrates Trotter's ability to balance the intense individual flavors of each course against the attributes of the wine being served. An example of a Grand Menu is shown in Figure 4.4.

Trotter also has a Kitchen Table Degustation, which is served to guests who dine at the kitchen table. This menu best illustrates his command of balancing



**FIGURE 4.4:** The Grand Menu at Charlie Trotter's offers a sumptuous multicourse variety of dishes

*Courtesy of Charlie Trotter*

flavors and portion sizes. Although the menu comprises about 15 courses, it is still the perfect amount of food. Chef Trotter's true genius is his sense of balance and harmony and his ability to layer together a diverse series of flavors, textures, and cultural influences, which are undeniably evident throughout the menu.<sup>14</sup>

## Restaurants in Las Vegas Represent the Best Countrywide

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The best 25 restaurants in Las Vegas are as good as the best 25 restaurants in any city in the world. Today, Las Vegas is probably the de facto capital of American cooking, the place where the nation's greatest chefs come together at the table.

Several years ago, Benihana may have been the best restaurant in town. A few years ago, a California Pizza Kitchen opened, and people were delighted because they were able to get something other than buffet-line prime rib and 75-cent shrimp cocktails.

When New York New York opened, it offered restaurants familiar to Manhattan-savvy diners: Chin Chin, Il Fornaio, and Gallagher's Steakhouse. Then Rio brought in Jean-Louis Palladin, dean of French chefs in America. Not to be outdone, The Mirage has James Beard Award-winning chef Alessandro Stratta at Renoir. The paintings there are real Renoirs. Bellagio has Le Cirque and Todd English's Olives restaurants.

For steakhouses, you can choose among The Palm, Gallagher's, Morton's of Chicago, Emeril Lagasse's new Delmonico, and Smith & Wollensky. French chefs include Jean-Louis Palladin, Charles Palmer, Jean-Georges Vongerichten, Joachim Splichal, Jean Joho, and Eberhard Muller. There are several different Wolfgang Puck restaurants in Las Vegas: Spago, Trattoria del Lupo, Postrio, and the Wolfgang Puck Bar & Grill.

## Menu Engineering

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Over the years, several approaches to menu engineering have been recommended. No matter which is adopted, the important point to remember is that there should be a balance between a menu too high in food cost, which results in giving food away, and too low in food cost, which rips off the customer. Expect some items on the menu to yield a higher margin than others.

Professor Jack Miller developed one of the earlier approaches to menu engineering. The winners were menu items that not only sold more but also were at a lower food-cost percentage. In 1982 professors Michael Kasavana and Donald Smith proposed *menu engineering*. In this approach, the best menu items—the stars—are those that have the highest contribution margin per unit and the highest sales. In 1985 Professor David Pavesic proposed a combination of three variables: food-cost percentage, contribution margin, and sales volume. Under this method, the best items are called primes—those with a low food-cost percentage and a high contribution margin weighted by sales volume.

More recently, Professors Mohamed E. Bayou and Lee B. Bennett proposed an approach to menu analyses and engineering whereby each item at each meal is analyzed. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner items are analyzed to compute their measure of profitability. They recommend analysis by:

- Individual menu items
- Categories of menu offering (e.g., appetizers, entrées)
- Meal periods or business categories (e.g., the breakfast meal period, the banquet business)<sup>15</sup>

Menu management software applications can help answer such questions as:<sup>16</sup>

- What is the most profitable price to assign a menu item?
- At what price level and mix of sale does a foodservice operation maximize its profits?
- Which current menu items require reprising, retention, replacement, or repositioning on the menu?
- How should daily specials and new items be priced?
- How can the success of a menu change be evaluated?

Menu engineering is a management application that takes a deterministic approach in evaluating decisions regarding current and future menu pricing, design, and contents. This application requires that management focus on the number of dollars a menu contributes to profit not simply monitor cost percentages.<sup>17</sup> For a more detailed review of menu engineering consult one of the Wiley cost control texts.

Dr. Pavesic recommends that restaurant operators first think of the psychological factors that influence guests' price perception. He suggests some guidelines in menu pricing:

1. Use odd-cents increments for digits to the right of the decimal point.
2. Do not write price increases over old prices.
3. Resist increases that raise the dollar amount of the item.
4. Give items that have been drastically increased in price a less noticeable spot on the menu.
5. Try reducing large portions before raising prices. Some restaurant operators suggest taking the items off the menu or changing the dish because regular guests might notice the smaller portions and feel that they were being cheated.
6. Never increase the price on all menu items.
7. Put "market-priced" on items that fluctuate wildly in price.
8. Do not list menu items according to cost, and make sure that menu prices appear after an item's description rather than in a straight column.<sup>18</sup>

Odd-cent menu pricing is widely used in fast-food restaurants. Pricing an item using the 98-cent approach may not be appropriate for unit-scale restaurants, and it certainly should not be used for fine-dining establishments. Many of these price items end in 95 cents. For example, lobster at \$19.95 seems appropriate, while \$19.98 does not.

## Menu Design and Layout

*Menu design and layout* have been called the silent salespersons of the restaurant. The overall menu design should reflect the ambience of the restaurant. With the aid of graphic artists and designers or the personal computer, menus can be designed to complement decor and ambience.

The menu size may range from a single page up to several pages and be of a variety of shapes; however, menus are generally 9 by 12 inches or 11 by 17 inches. The printing may be elaborate or simple. Both the printing and the artwork should harmonize with the overall theme of the restaurant. The names of the dishes should be easy to read and understand. The menu cover is a symbol of the restaurant's identity.

For menus of more than one page, the outside cover may have the name of the restaurant and a picture appropriate to its style. The layout, typeface, illustrations, graphic design, paper color, and menu copy are a matter of personal choice. Several menu design–related sites on the World Wide Web feature menu borders and other graphics. Today's personal computers can easily create menus du jour using special software packages. The advantages of making your own menus are flexibility and the ability to recollect daily specials (that way, servers won't forget them!). Money is saved on expensive designers and print shops, records are easily kept, and great graphics are just a mouse click away.

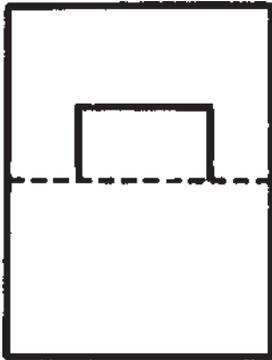
We tend to better remember the first and last things that we see or hear. When reading menus, people are also attracted to images, graphics, and icons that will increase sales of particular items—those with the best contribution margins, one hopes.

The layout and sequence of the menu may be a single page encased in plastic laminate. If the menu is more extensive, there is more space on the back for the desserts and beverages.

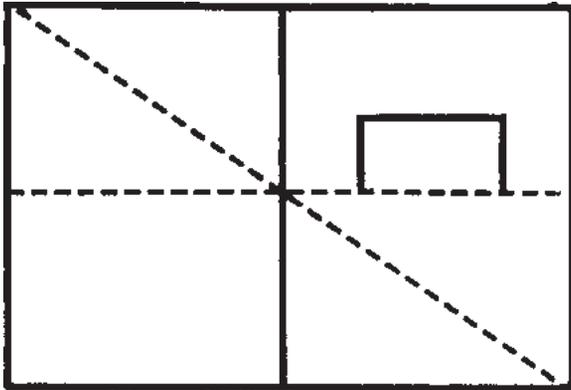
The focal point of a single-page menu is just above the center, an ideal place to list a special item that may be highlighted to increase sales. This item should also yield a good profit margin because it is a high-selling item. Figure 4.5 shows the focal point of a single-page menu and Figure 4.6 shows the focal point of a two- or four-page menu.

Menus with two or more pages may be laid out in an appealing way with a signature item or special dishes highlighted or boxed in the focal points. Beverages may appear on the back page or even as a suggestion to accompany a certain dish.

More elaborate menus include additional folds and more pages. Some menus have three panels, while others have inserts for featured specials. Color photographs and graphic designs assist chain guests in making a selection. The Olive Garden has won awards for its picture menu. It and many other fine restaurants



**FIGURE 4.5:** Focal point of a single-page menu



**FIGURE 4.6:** Focal point of two- or four-page menu

use photographs to depict menu dishes. Considering that many restaurant guests eat with their eyes, the picture menu is an effective merchandising tool.

Figure 4.7 shows the menu for Chez Panisse, Alice Waters's renowned Berkeley restaurant. Figure 4.8 shows the menu for Cantina Latina, a new Latin-themed restaurant in Sarasota, Florida.

# CHEZ PANISSE

## DOWNSTAIRS DINNER MENUS

MONDAY, OCTOBER 13 \$50

Cipollini onion tart with DeeAnn's garden lettuces  
*Epaule d'agneau farcie*: shoulder of Niman Ranch lamb stuffed with chard and olives, with wide noodles and herbs  
 Baked Bartlett pear with raspberry ice cream

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 14 \$65

Elizabeth David's heirloom tomato salad with crème fraîche and herbs  
 Bay scallops sautéed à la provençale  
 Spit-roasted Sonoma County Liberty duck with quince sauce, Chino Ranch carrots, flat black cabbage, and crispy potatoes  
 Warm chocolate fondant with hazelnut ice cream

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 15 \$65

Roasted pepper salad with fresh anchovies  
 Giuliano Bugialli's lasagne verde  
 Spit-roasted Niman Ranch pork loin with fig and cipollini onion compote, haricots verts, and straw potato cake  
 Three fall sherbets with pizzelle

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 16 \$65

Warm wild mushroom toasts with DeeAnn's garden lettuces  
 Potato gnocchi with wilted escarole and garlic  
 Spit-roasted Hoffman Farm chicken with fried onion rings and green beans with red peppers  
 Raspberry-almond meringue

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 17 \$75

An aperitif  
 Two color tomato soup with fried polenta sticks and basil oil  
 Garlic and cheese soufflé with herbs and garden salad  
 Grilled last of the season local king salmon with bacon, chardonnay sauce, and fennel mirepoix  
 Pear and frangipane tart

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 18 \$75

An aperitif  
 Fall tomato and hook-and-line caught Atlantic cod salad with basil  
 Tuscan farro and shell bean soup  
 Grilled Paine Farm squab with garlic sauce, fried eggplant, and braised fall greens  
 Tiramisu

Service charge: 15 percent      Corkage: \$20 per bottle, limit two (750-ml.) per table.      Sales tax: 8½ percent  
 Most of our produce and meat comes from local farms and ranches that practice ecologically sound agriculture.  
 Other fish varieties may have to be substituted.      www.chezpanisse.com  
 1517 Shattuck Avenue, Berkeley, California 94709      Reservations: (510) 548-5535

**FIGURE 4.7:** At Chez Panisse, in Berkeley, California, only the finest fresh and organic ingredients are used

Courtesy of Alice Waters



**FIGURE 4.8:** The menu for Cantina Latina features moderately priced items from Latin America. The restaurant is featured in Chapter 3  
Courtesy of Cantina Latina

## HOUSE SPECIALTIES

ALL ENTREES SERVED WITH YOUR CHOICE OF 2 HOMEMADE SIDE DISHES

<h3 style="text-align: center;">CARIBBEAN</h3> <p><b>Palomilla Steak</b> ..... \$9.95 <i>Ricely marinated top sirloin sautéed with fresh onions.</i></p> <p><b>Grilled Tilapia</b> ..... \$9.95 <i>Served blackened or with garlic butter.</i></p> <p><b>Mojo Garlic Shrimp</b> ..... \$9.95 <i>Sautéed in a delicate wine, butter and herb broth.</i></p> <p><b>Roast Pork</b> ..... \$8.95 <i>Slowly roasted garlic marinated pork with herbs and Caribbean seasonings.</i></p> <p><b>Chicken Fricassee</b> ..... \$7.95 <i>Slowly simmered chicken breast served in an herb &amp; wine tomato sauce.</i></p> <p><b>Steak &amp; Salsa</b> ..... \$7.95 <i>Braised steak tips with onions served in a rich brown tomato sauce.</i></p> <p><b>Beef Picadillo</b> ..... \$6.95 <i>Lean ground beef accompanied by manzanilla olives, sautéed onions and ground fresh tomatoes.</i></p>	<h3 style="text-align: center;">MEXICAN</h3> <p><b>Steak Fajitas</b> ..... \$9.95 <i>Ricely marinated steak strips grilled with fresh onions and bell peppers. Served with flour tortillas.</i></p> <p><b>Chicken Fajitas</b> ..... \$9.95 <i>Tender strips of chicken breast grilled with fresh onions and bell peppers. Served with flour tortillas.</i></p> <p><b>Cheese Fajitas</b> ..... \$7.95 <i>Strips of queso panela - Mexico's #1 favorite cheese, grilled with onions and bell peppers. Served with flour tortillas.</i></p> <p><b>Steak Quesadillas (2)</b> ..... \$7.95 <i>Marinated steak strips sautéed with bell peppers, onions and queso quesadilla - Mexico's authentic melting cheese, in grilled flour tortillas.</i></p> <p><b>Chicken Quesadillas (2)</b> ..... \$7.95 <i>Tender strips of chicken breast sautéed with bell peppers, onions and queso quesadilla in grilled flour tortillas.</i></p> <p><b>Veggie Quesadillas (2)</b> ..... \$7.95 <i>Featuring sautéed fresh mushrooms, bell peppers, onions, green beans, carrots and queso quesadilla in grilled flour tortillas.</i></p>
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<h3 style="text-align: center;">SIDE DISHES</h3> <p><b>Cotija Corn</b> ..... \$1.95 <i>Roasted corn-on-the-cob slathered with real Crema Mexicana and rolled in grated queso cotija - the parmesan of Mexico.</i></p> <p><b>Colombian Green Beans</b> ..... \$1.95 <i>Fresh and sautéed with tomatoes and onions.</i></p> <p><b>Spanish Yellow Rice</b> ..... \$1.95 <i>Saffron flavored featuring finely chopped ham.</i></p> <p><b>Lita's White Rice</b> ..... \$1.95 <i>Our great grandmother's recipe - awesome!</i></p> <p><b>Cuban Black Beans</b> ..... \$1.95 <i>Simmered fresh with garlic, onions and Caribbean sofrito.</i></p> <p><b>Costa Rican Red Beans</b> ..... \$1.95 <i>Cooked fresh with authentic herbs and spices.</i></p> <p><b>Sweet Ripe Plantains</b> ..... \$1.95 <i>The caramelized cousin of the banana.</i></p> <p><b>Tostones</b> ..... \$1.95 <i>Smailed green plantains, freshly fried and salted.</i></p> <p><b>Yucca in Mojo</b> ..... \$1.95 <i>Served in a garlic butter sauce.</i></p> <p><b>Christian's Yucca Fries</b> ..... \$1.95 <i>Fresh fried and lightly salted.</i></p>	<h3 style="text-align: center;">DESSERTS</h3> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: small;">BAKED WITH LOVING ADHERENCE TO OUR GRANDMOTHER MARIA'S COSTA RICAN RECIPES.</p> <p><b>Cream Cheese Flan</b> ..... \$3.95 <i>Drizzled with a delicate caramel sauce.</i></p> <p><b>Torta De Chocolate</b> ..... \$3.95 <i>Moist and rich chocolate cake enhanced with chopped almonds.</i></p> <p><b>Maria's Hot Apple Pie</b> ..... \$3.95 <i>Fresh Pippin apples baked with butter and cinnamon.</i></p> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: x-small;">ALL DESSERTS CAN BE TOPPED WITH A SCOOP OF VANILLA ICE CREAM FOR AN ADDITIONAL \$.75</p>
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	<h3>BEVERAGES</h3>
	<p>Sodas ..... \$ 1.00</p> <p>Iced Tea ..... \$ 1.00</p> <p>Bottled Water ..... \$ 1.50</p> <p>Colombian Coffee ..... \$ 1.25</p> <p>Cuban Espresso ..... \$ 1.25</p> <p>Cappuccino ..... \$ 2.00</p> <p>Café con Leche - Latte ..... \$ 2.00</p> <p>Domestic Beers ..... \$ 2.25</p> <p>Imported Latin Beers ..... \$ 3.00</p> <p>Sangria ..... glass \$3.00 ..... pitcher \$12.50</p> <p>Argentinean &amp; Chilean Wine ..... by the glass or bottle</p>

### “OUR STORY”

My fondest memory as a young girl in Colombia, was playing accordion with our church group. During concerts, the aroma of fresh bread baking and hot chocolate steeping, was the impetus for our taking long breaks.

As a teenager, life transported me to the island of Puerto Rico, where I discovered the exotic flavors of roast pork, sweet ripe plantains, rice with pigeon peas and my Costa Rican husband - Albert.

Next stop was Los Angeles, where I was introduced to exquisite Mexican food and the joys of motherhood. Christian was born in '81 and Alexandra in '83.

We moved to Tampa in '84, where we built one of the first major tortilla factories in the Southeast.

Selling the business in '88, we traveled extensively throughout Costa Rica, the Caribbean and Mexico, wishing that someday we'd open our own Latin American restaurant.

Now that our dream is a reality, we invite you to enjoy Cantina Latina's authentic cuisine, the vibrant heritage of our music and our "Cantina Color.

Shake your maracas!  
Amanda, Christian & Alexandra

DANCING TO OUR LATIN BAND ON FRI & SAT 9PM-12AM

FIGURE 4.8: (continued)

The paper on which the menu is printed should reflect the atmosphere of the restaurant. In fine dining, use a low-key, expensive paper, and have an inexpensive reduced-size menu available for customers to take with them. A quick-service restaurant may rely completely on a lighted display menu located above the service center. Coffee-shop menus often use a heavy stock paper, enclosed in plastic, with color photos of menu items. The restaurant that changes menu items frequently, perhaps daily, may use a blackboard or a desktop computer to produce the menu.

When starting a new restaurant, it is more cost effective to print two or three menus in the first few weeks and months of operation as guests' choices determine which menu items are popular and which are not. If a restaurant operator prints an elaborate and expensive menu, it will cost even more when changes are required and new menus are printed.

In an effort to encourage guests to spend more some restaurants are placing the menu prices close to the menu description and not on the far right because they feel that many guests' eyes are scanning the prices and not the food descriptions. This design will make it difficult for guests to compare prices and settle for the cheap dish. Importantly, the design will help force guests to read the food description.<sup>19</sup>

## **Standardized Recipes**

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Standardized recipes are used to maintain consistent food quality. A carefully developed recipe helps cooks because the portion size, ingredients, weights, and production steps, including cooking methods and time, are clearly indicated. Restaurant guests will be offered consistently high-quality food. The standard recipe also acts as a control device in that the same ingredients in the same amounts are used over time.

## **Menu Trends**

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*Restaurant and Institutions* magazine suggests the following menu trends in the next few years:<sup>20</sup>

1. Pot roast and brisket and stew: Homey favorites spotlighting affordable cuts for comfort and value-minded diners.
2. Asian plus Latin a dynamic duo: The twitter-driven frenzy over Los Angeles' Kogi truck and its signature Korean tacos gets at least some of the credit for this latest fusion craze, which will only get bigger.
3. Midday dining meals: With guests cutting back on dining out far more at dinner than at other times of day, many operators are turning to speed- and value-oriented lunch specials in an effort to grab more midday dining dollars.

4. Beer, there and everywhere: Restaurant beer sales are rising in part because guests perceive a specialty beer as an affordable luxury. Seasonal labels, promotion of menu pairings, and themed dinners along with beer-centric eateries all help add to the sales.
5. Chains build better burgers: Premium burgers represent the ultimate marriage of value and indulgence, so it's no wonder that chains are following the lead of high-end chefs and nudging up America's favorite sandwich a few notches.
6. Big-name chefs take it down a notch: The drive toward downscale dining continues: Witness Big Star, Chicago chef Paul Kahan's just opened dive bar/taco shack; Il Cane Rosso, the San Francisco sandwich shop from Coi chef-owner Daniel Patterson; and Bar Symon, Michael Symon's gastropub-style spot in Cleveland.
7. Meatless meals: American's aren't quite embracing vegetarianism en masse, but eschewing meat more often in the interest of health and environmental sustainability is most defiantly in vogue.
8. Fast, casual fine dining: Restaurants are rolling out special menus that cut the cost of multicourse meals and/or trim down dining time.
9. Low-carbon-footprint dining: Reducing carbon footprints—the total amount of greenhouse gases produced by a particular activity—offers a holistic approach to going green.
10. Smoking: From the subtle notes of fruitwoods to the more assertive makes of mesquite and hickory, smoking lets chefs imbue layers of flavor into products without adding fat, sugar, or sodium.

Other identifiable trends are more nutritious kids' meals, farm-branded ingredients, gluten-free/food-allergy-conscious meals, and sustainable seafood. Calorie information is also a hot topic.<sup>21</sup>

## Summary

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Menu and menu planning are the most crucial elements of the restaurant. The many considerations in menu planning help us realize the scope and depth of general planning necessary for successful operation. The two main approaches to menu pricing strategies are comparative and individual dish costing. Contribution margins vary from item to item, with the higher food-cost percentage items yielding the greater contribution margin. The various types of menus and menu items are discussed, together with menu design and layout.

## Key Terms and Concepts

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Accuracy in menu  
Availability

Capability/consistency  
Considerations in menu planning

Contribution margin	Menu types
Equipment	Nutritional value
Food-cost percentage	Price
Menu design and layout	Raw fare
Menu engineering	Vegan
Menu items	Vegetarian
Menu pricing strategies	

## Review Questions

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1. How would you prioritize the considerations in menu planning for your restaurant?
2. There is a trade-off between a fully qualified chef and higher costs. How can a balance be achieved to leave a reasonable return for the owners?
3. To achieve maximum efficiency in your restaurant's kitchen, who should be involved?
4. Discuss how the equipment and menu must harmonize to create a smooth operation.
5. Ask several restaurant owners/managers how they arrived at their menu prices, and compare their answers with the methods suggested in the text.
6. Use sample menus to analyze:
  - How many items are in each course?
  - What equipment will be required for each?
  - Select a few items and determine what you would expect their food-cost percentage to be.
7. How seriously should restaurant operators become involved with the nutritional content of foods the chefs serve?
8. Describe the sources of the menu items that will be featured on your menu.
9. Describe how your menu will look when presented to guests.
10. What will your restaurant food-cost percentage be? How will you achieve it?

## Internet Exercise

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1. Go to the Web site for Nation's Restaurant News, <http://www.nrn.com/> and search for interesting new menu items to share with your class and professor.
2. Search for interesting menus on restaurant Web sites. Consider the techniques used in their preparation, the equipment needed, and the skill level of the chef.

## Endnotes

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